

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, Rep. Pete Stark joined House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer, Rep. Charles Rangel, Rep. John Dingell and other colleagues to unveil the Democratic plan to add a real prescription drug benefit to Medicare.

The following is Rep. Stark's statement:

"Today, Democrats are answering the American people's call for a real prescription drug benefit. Our Democratic plan guarantees comprehensive and affordable prescription drug coverage to all seniors and disabled Americans on Medicare. There are no gaps and no gimmicks. In contrast, the President's so-called framework fails to meet the need. It's not a plan at all. The concepts outlined would offer virtually no coverage to the 89% of beneficiaries who are in traditional Medicare.

"Our plan calls for a low monthly premium of \$25, a \$100 per year deductible, and 20% co-insurance with an annual out-of-pocket cap of \$2,000. Medicare will pay toward the cost of every prescription drug. No senior will have to pay more than \$2,000 for drugs in a year and many will pay far less. Only our plan guarantees this drug coverage for every senior, regardless of where they live and whether they are in traditional Medicare or enrolled in a private plan.

"Our Democratic plan will also lower prescription drug costs by using the market clout of America's 40 million Medicare beneficiaries to negotiate significantly lower prices. It will also reduce prescription drug costs for all Americans by closing loopholes in current law that allow pharmaceutical companies to game the patent system and prevent competition from equally effective, but lower cost, generic drugs.

"Unlike the President's plan, our Democratic proposal will never force elderly or disabled Americans to give up traditional Medicare in order to get a prescription drug benefit. Beneficiaries will be free to choose between the traditional Medicare program and private plans. But it will be a real choice, not coerced through the lure of a more generous prescription drug benefit.

"Don't be fooled by the President's rhetoric. He doesn't have a plan. His framework is a misguided attempt to disguise the Republicans' effort to privatize Medicare, while doling out hundreds of billions of dollars in federal tax dollar giveaways to the big insurance and pharmaceutical companies. And, no matter how you measure it, beneficiaries will pay more and get less under President Bush's plan.

"Our bill meets the needs of the 40 million Americans who depend on Medicare. That's why the leading beneficiary organizations support this legislation. I hope our colleagues will join us in supporting the only plan that gives seniors what they need and deserve: a real prescription drug benefit that's affordable and available to all Medicare beneficiaries."